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# Address the Causes, Not Just Effects

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In 1957, a young American senator said, "The most powerful single force in the world today is neither communism nor capitalism, neither the H-bomb nor the guided missile. It is man's eternal desire to be free and independent."

The senator might have been predicting the recent wave of terrorism, for his remark explains much about the motives behind the hijacking of the Achille Lauro—and TWA Flight 847 last summer. It also applies to the deaths of almost 300 Americans in suicide bombings over the last three years at a Marine compound and at embassies in Lebanon and Kuwait, and the kidnappings of nine Americans, six of whom are still held hostage.

In each case, the attacks were not from love of violence, but from expressions of rage and frustration over an inability to achieve some form of freedom or independence.

The Rev. Benjamin M. Weir, freed in September after being held hostage for 14 months by Shia extremists in Lebanon, said, "I shy away from the word 'terrorist,' a loaded term that tends to set up opposites. Actions of governments, including my own, can sometimes be classified as terrorism as terrible as that of individuals." Or, as an adage goes, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter."

In an age of nuclear weaponry, terrorism has become the idiom of expression among the weak and desperate in confronting superpowers they feel are not listening. That does not mean terrorism should be condoned; but it does mean the reasons behind it must be understood—or the violence will only escalate. Indeed, experts now predict that terrorism, once limited largely to foreign shores, may soon target American officials and installations at home.

The dramatic midair interception of the four hijackers gives cause to celebrate, but only temporarily. Nabbing a mugger does not eliminate the motives behind street crime. The problem goes deeper.

Rather than being obsessed by the mechanics and personalities—the hows and whos—of terrorism, the United States must focus on the whys.

So far, the United States has been unrealistic in dealing with the complexity of terrorism. Spending \$3.3 billion for the biggest embassy-rebuilding program in U.S. history to improve security at 139 diplomatic posts will not end the threat. Nor will warning Americans against using international airports with lax security. And offering \$500,000 to individual informers is unlikely to tempt the committed opponent.

Nor will retaliation work. As the Israelis discovered in south Lebanon, the eye-for-an-eye approach can backfire disastrously. During Israel's three-year occupation, more than 600 soldiers died.

Indeed, the use of force—either in retaliation or to preempt future attacks—only escalates the cycle of violence, providing new motives for expression of rage, raising the timbre and stakes.

Shlomo Gazit, a former chief of Israeli military intelligence, states, "There is no technical-military solution to the problem of terrorism. There is only a political solution."

During its 40 years as a superpower, the

United States has usually dealt only with effects of specific incidents. It is time for Washington to stand back from the passion and fury that follows each incident and begin looking at the roots of violent opposition.

Policy-makers could start by not lumping incidents together as if a monolithic anti-American force were at work; that is as errantly simplistic as Iran calling the United States "the Great Satan" and condemning everything American. Somehow the capture of the Achille Lauro hijackers is now being perceived as partial compensation for the impotence felt during the 17-day trauma of TWA 847. In fact, the two are unrelated.

Two strains of terrorism, with separate goals and different tactics, emanate from the Middle East today.

The first involves the kind of Palestinians who hijacked the Achille Lauro. Their cause is a homeland. Their terrorism is designed to frighten or pressure Israel and its ally, the United States, into recognizing them and what they feel are their rights.

The second involves Islamic militants, particularly Shia Muslims, who are responsible for the hijacking of TWA 847, the suicide bombings and the abductions of Americans in Lebanon. Their terrorism is aimed at eliminating what they say is foreign domination and encroachment on every aspect of their lives, particularly by the United States, over the last 40 years.

Within both movements are many branches, each with specific, often different, flash points. Ironically, the two broad groups have been at odds, particularly in Lebanon, where fighting between Shias and Palestinians has killed hundreds since May.

The danger for the United States, however, is that these two disparate forces will some day act in unison, intentionally or indirectly, as a result of anti-American fervor, unleashing a force so potent that costly and humiliating attacks so far will seem small by comparison. Although it is remote now, that possibility was evident earlier this month when Islamic Jihad, the underground Shia group in Lebanon, claimed it had killed U.S. hostage William Buckley in retaliation for Israel's attack on the Palestine Liberation Organization headquarters in Tunisia. However, the specific circumstances in this case remain murky.

To end or at least diminish terrorism from the Middle East, the only lasting solution lies in tackling, with urgency, the two basic problems in that volatile region.

First, the United States needs, finally, to get the Arabs and Israelis to the peace table—without being waylaid by rhetoric or the often-violent advance posturing. Before the spate of recent incidents—the murder of three Israelis by Palestinians in Cyprus, the Israeli air strike on PLO headquarters that killed 60 and the piracy—the United States and Jordan's King Hussein appeared to be making progress. Attempts to end a 37-year dispute should not be aborted because of the heat of the moment.

Second, the United States and its Western allies need to begin defusing the tension with Islamic militants who say they have been increasingly overwhelmed and manipulated by the West since Napoleon Bonaparte conquered Egypt almost 200 years ago.

Neither act involves “conceding” to terrorism, but rather emphasizes constructive rather than destructive policies.

And neither will be done easily, quickly or, probably, without further bloodshed. But the United States needs to take the initiative in rooting out causes of terrorism rather than simply reacting to attacks. The United States has the resources and the power; it lacks only the confidence and determination.

The same senator who spoke of freedom and independence, John F. Kennedy, told the United Nations after he was elected President, “If we can all persevere, if we can in every land and office look beyond our own shores and ambitions, then surely the age will dawn in which the strong are just, and the weak secure and the peace preserved.” □